

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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9 February 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Constantine C. Menges
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SUBJECT : Monthly Warning Assessment: Latin America

El Salvador

1. Despite the agreements reached with Defense Minister Garcia and rebel Army Commander Ochoa earlier this month, the power struggle within the military has yet to be resolved. Although there is some potential (30 percent) that the conflict could get out of hand resulting in a coup or a standoff posing some military units against each other, on balance most analysts believe the dispute will be resolved in such a way that the government's counterinsurgency effort and reform program will not be seriously impaired. Some military units are concerned that Garcia might not resign, but he lacks the military and political support to extend his stay in office. Opposition to Garcia stems from ideological differences, the belief of many younger officers that Garcia and his generation of officers should retire opening the way for their advancement, and frustration over Garcia's reluctance to adopt a more aggressive war strategy.

2. Extreme right Assembly leader D'Aubuisson has increasingly tried to exploit military dissatisfaction with Garcia, and some of his ultrarightist supporters may try to block the appointment of General Vides Casanova, a relative moderate who is next in line for Garcia's post. Most military leaders, however, are center-right and pragmatic. They recognize the key role the reforms have played in obtaining and sustaining international and popular support for the government and probably would move successfully to block any attempted "takeover" by ultraconservative forces. The recent bombing of ARENA headquarters also points up the potential for increased political violence. If the bitter rivalry between Garcia and D'Aubuisson intensifies, bombings, shootings, and assassinations are possible.

3. The military power struggle has damaged unity within the armed forces and the guerrillas will continue to exploit it for maximum propaganda and tactical effect. They have long planned an offensive for early this year and may have advanced the timetable to take advantage of the military rebellion.

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The military has responded with a large counteroffensive -- in part to show that the political bickering in San Salvador has not diminished its ability to carry out the war. The guerrilla military momentum is building and is highly dangerous in itself and worse in the context of the intragovernmental divisions.

Argentina

4. The decision to hold elections sooner--in November 1983 instead of March 1984--reflects growing concern over the weakness of the current military regime. Although the incompetence of the Bignone government has become increasingly apparent, a change at the top probably would not lead to any significant shifts in policy or the cancellation of elections. Analysts suspect that the recent news leaks about secret Argentine preparations to take military action against the British may have reduced the chances of such action being taken. They believe a military raid was being contemplated primarily to put the UK on notice as to the seriousness of Argentine intentions as well as to refocus international attention on the issue; both these objectives were accomplished in large part by the press disclosures.

Suriname

5. Army Commander Bouterse has become increasingly dependent on a diminishing corps of loyal supporters. On 10 January Bouterse dismissed twelve military officers and an additional eleven subsequently resigned, virtually wiping out the officer corps. Bouterse probably will seek to fashion a smaller, more loyal army and could turn to Havana, Grenada or some other Cuban partner to provide some military training--although language differences would pose a problem. Although there is still no credible evidence of a Cuban military presence in the country, the number of Cuban advisers has doubled from eight last December and a growing Cuban role and presence is likely. Bouterse has had little success so far in locating other sources of external financial support.

6. Most analysts doubt that any of the newly formed exile opposition movements would pose a serious threat to Bouterse in the near term, but note that some potential remains for conservatives or radical leftists in the military to attempt a move against Bouterse. So long as Bouterse sees his position threatened, the potential for more purges or executions remains high.

7. The NIO/LA believes the Cuban-supported deceptive consolidation of power is continuing and that each passing month will see a pro-Cuban regime more firmly in place.

Grenada

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The appearance of the Soviet equipment undermines previous Cuban and Soviet denials that they had no strategic interests in

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Grenada. The new camp could be used to train leftist radicals from other Caribbean islands or to stockpile weapons for transshipment to extremist leftist groups or governments in the region.

Nicaragua

9. The construction of a major new airfield at a remote location north of Managua, Nicaragua, probably reflects Managua's desire to move the present and future Air Force (based at Sandino International Airport) to a more secure facility. The new airport apparently will be able to handle any aircraft that Cubans and Nicaraguans now have as well as planes as large as Soviet TU-95s and AN-22s. It is not likely to be operational before the end of the year. Several recent reports suggest that as the military buildup continues, the Nicaraguans have become increasingly confident of their military capabilities.

Bolivia

10. The announcement at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Nicaragua that Bolivia and Cuba were restoring full diplomatic relations apparently caught President Siles somewhat offguard. President Siles wants to expand his government's contacts with the NAM--and Cuba is a key member--but he probably would have preferred a more gradual process vis-a-vis Cuba given the military's distaste for the Cubans.

11. Most analysts believe there are only a handful of Cuban and Nicaraguan advisers in Bolivia, and discount reports of tens or hundreds arriving recently as rumor-mongering or possible Argentine disinformation. A dramatic increase in the Cuban or Nicaraguan role and presence is not seen as likely despite the less conservative inclination of the current government. Most analysts believe the Siles government is likely to weather the current cabinet crisis, but expect the military to move--probably successfully--to oust Siles within four months. The NIO/LA is concerned about a possible Cuban/Nicaraguan/Soviet bloc subversive effort which would seek to neutralize the military and build up a far left coalition within the context of the current government using the Vice President, the MIR, and communist elements in organized labor.

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- 3 -

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